

## Food for the Heart

Written by Utah Department of Health

Friday, 20 March 2009 12:43 - Last Updated Thursday, 25 June 2009 13:28

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Continuing from February's American Heart Month, in the month of March you should keep on loving your heart and your taste buds by embracing brightly colored (and delicious) fruits and vegetables, whole grains, beans, nuts and soy products. All of these foods contain heart-protecting antioxidants and fiber, making it possible to prevent heart disease through diet. Healthy food habits can help you reduce three of the major risk factors for heart attack - high blood cholesterol, high blood pressure and excess body weight. They'll also help reduce your risk of stroke, because heart disease and high blood pressure are major risk factors for stroke.

When it comes preventing heart disease through diet, there's quite a bit you can do. Following a healthy eating plan will help you achieve and maintain a healthy body weight, a desirable blood cholesterol level and a normal blood pressure.

A healthy eating pattern is based on these recommendations:

- Use up      at least as many calories as you take in.
- Be      physically active. Aim for at least 30 minutes of physical activity on      most days of the week or, best of all, at least 30 minutes every day.
- Eat a      variety of nutritious foods from all the food groups. To get the nutrients      you need, choose foods like vegetables, fruits, fish, whole-grain products      and fat-free or low-fat dairy products most often..
- Eat      less of the nutrient-poor foods.      Limit foods and beverages that are high in calories but low in      nutrients.

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- Choose lean meats and poultry without skin and prepare them without added saturated and trans fat.
- Select fat-free, 1 percent fat, and low-fat dairy products.
- Cut back on foods containing partially hydrogenated vegetable oils to reduce trans fat in your diet.
- Cut back on foods high in dietary cholesterol. Try to eat less than 300 milligrams of cholesterol each day.
- Cut back on beverages and foods with added sugars.
- Choose and prepare foods with little or no salt. Aim to eat less than 2,300 milligrams of sodium per day.
- If you drink alcohol, drink in moderation. That means one drink per day if you're a woman and two drinks per day if you're a man.
- Follow the American Heart Association recommendations when you eat out, and keep an eye on your portion sizes.

You don't have to give up your favorite foods, and every meal doesn't have to meet all the guidelines. Your overall eating pattern is more important than an individual meal. The secret to success is balance. If you sometimes have a high-fat dish for dinner, balance it with lower-fat foods such as steamed vegetables or a fruit for dessert. The same idea applies to high-fat or salty snacks. Eat small amounts, and balance them with foods low in saturated fat, trans fat, cholesterol and sodium, such as fruits, vegetables and fat-free milk products.

These guidelines may do more than improve your heart health. They may reduce your risk for other chronic health problems, including type 2 diabetes, osteoporosis (bone loss) and some forms of cancer. So enjoy a heart-healthy diet—and add in a good dose of daily exercise—and you'll be on your way to a healthier lifestyle!

Source: [www.americanheart.org](http://www.americanheart.org)